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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KHARTOUM 001521

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG

NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

TRIPOLI FOR CANDINO

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TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL KPKO UN AU SU

SUBJECT: SUDAN PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE SET TO START OCTOBER 16,
DOHA PEACE TALKS POSSIBLY BY THE END OF THE MONTH

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1510

1B. KHARTOUM 1504

1C. KHARTOUM 1490

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Classified By: CDA a.i. Mark Asquino, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) The Sudan People's Initiative is scheduled to begin October 16 in Khartoum with speeches by President Bashir and other officials including First Vice President Salva Kiir, who has decided to attend, but will deliver a "tough message" on Darfur. Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leader and Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signatory Minni Minawi, still in Darfur but the fourth-ranking member of the GNU, appears poised to attend. However, before formally committing to be there, he is holding out for funding for the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority (TDRA), as agreed with Vice President Taha in El Fasher last month. UN/AU Chief Mediator Bassole considered not attending to avoid associating himself with the Arab League's attempt to prevent an ICC indictment of President Bashir, but later reconsidered. He is now meeting with SYG Ban ki Moon in Geneva to discuss his (Bassole's) role in the Qatar initiative. No major rebel groups will attend; SLA/U reported that GOS attacks against its positions east of Muhajaria continue. The Qatari Foreign Minister and possibly the Prime Minister will arrive in Khartoum tomorrow to attend the opening ceremony, along with Foreign Ministers from several Arab and African countries. CDA Fernandez along with other senior, Khartoum-based diplomats, have been invited and will attend this opening session. Following the latter, there will be a week-long conference in Kenana, Gezira State with the goal of producing a draft proposal on ending the Darfur crisis. The NCP believes that the peace talks in Doha, Qatar could begin as soon as October 28.

12. (C) See paragraph 10 for recommendations on possible US interventions to encourage rebel participation at Doha and with the government of Qatar to make the most of the Doha talks. Although the talks began as an attempt to save President Bashir from a looming ICC indictment, they could very well serve to advance discussions on Darfur. Although such an outcome is far from certain, they could also produce positive results, depending on the concessions the regime is willing to make.

THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE

¶13. (C) NCP strategist Sayed Al-Khateeb told poloffs October 13 that the GoS will launch the Sudan People's Initiative (SPI) on Darfur on October 16 (ref A). Although the opening of the conference will take place in Khartoum, participants will move to Kenana in Gezira State for plenary discussions and sub-committee meetings through October 23rd. Al-Khateeb said that all players - Darfur rebel groups, political parties, and civil society - have been extended an invitation to participate in the SPI Conference. Although he doubted that rebel groups will attend, he said that members from Darfuri civil society (selected by the regime) will be present. GNU President Al-Bashir will open the Conference by proposing a package of items that the GoS might offer on Darfur such as a single Darfur state, a vice presidential post, and development funding (reftels). The key, said Al-Khateeb, will be getting Darfur rebel factions to the table to negotiate on such a package. The intent is for the one-week consultative conference to produce a number of recommendations from "the Sudanese people" that the GoS can pull together to develop a single proposal for a political settlement to the Darfur crisis. Khateeb said that following the conference the GoS and Darfur rebel groups would ideally meet to negotiate on the proposed settlement in Doha Talks there could begin as soon as October 28. The SPI conference will put pressure on the rebels to conclude that there are acceptable non-military solutions to the crisis, said Al-Khateeb.

¶14. (C) PolChief urged that the GoS conduct bilateral meetings with key rebel leaders such as the Justice and Equality

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Movement's (JEM's) Khalil Ibrahim, Sudan Liberation Movement's (SLM's) Abdel-Wahid Al-Nur, and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Unity's (SLM-Unity's) Abdallah Yehia and Sharif Harir in advance of negotiations. Al-Khateeb agreed with this approach and said that GNU Vice President Ali Osman Taha is considering holding bilateral meetings with rebel groups himself in Doha (or allowing the regime's security head man, National Intelligence and Security Service Chief Salah Ghosh, to do so,) but did not commit to meetings with rebels before the Doha talks. Al-Khateeb claimed that the GoS is willing to entertain the unification of Darfur into one state or Abdel-Wahid's call for the creation of a fourth Darfur State. PolChief also recommended that the GoS propose its own political settlement to the Darfur crisis at the SPI conference, rather than just sitting back and listening to the recommendations of others. Al-Khateeb encouraged the USG, as well as other international actors, to play a more active role in bringing rebel groups together to establish a common political stance and to persuade them to engage in negotiations with the GoS. "If you bring the rebels to the table, we'll be there," said Al-Khateeb. He recommended the international community support this action in the context of the Qatari Initiative. He said the biggest potential problem for the SPI is the unwillingness of key rebel groups to negotiate. If the GoS comes up with a package and the rebels fail to negotiate, then the problem of Darfur will fall to the international community to solve, said Al-Khateeb.

¶15. (C) Arab League Ambassador Halima told polchief October 13 that the Qatari Foreign Minister and possibly the Prime Minister would arrive October 15 in advance of the launch of the SPI. Halima said that Arab League SG Amr Musa as well as five additional Arab foreign ministers would attend the SPI, including Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. Halima pointed out that this is a joint Arab League - African Union initiative, not just a Qatari initiative, and said that five African Foreign Ministers would also attend including Senegal, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, and Burkina Faso. Halima acknowledged that the Arab League and the Qatars are "in over their heads and know nothing" about Darfur, but plan

to "buy off" the rebels in order to reach a peace agreement. Halima and polchief agreed that the Qatars and Bassole should carefully control the list of who is invited to Doha, and not simply accept a list from the regime, as this would be a recipe for disaster and would recreate the failed Sirte (Libya) peace talks of October 2007.

SPLM and SLM/MM

¶6. (C) SPLM D/SG Yasir Arman told poloffs on October 13 that FVP Salva Kiir will attend the opening ceremony of the SPI, but that Kiir will give a "tough speech" regarding what has happened in Darfur. He said the SPLM is not happy about the SPI, but is attempting to "make the most of a bad situation."

Arman said the SPLM is eager to work with Minawi, opposition parties, "real civil society" members and others opposed to the NCP in order to propose a credible solution on Darfur. For his part, Minawi has not decided whether he will attend the opening ceremony (despite GOS-sponsored press reports stating that he will be there,) but appears to be leaning in that direction, as Vice President Taha has been calling him to follow up on assurances that the TDRA will be partially funded as agreed in El Fasher last month. (Note: Minawi called poloffs multiple times between October 12 and 14 seeking advice on whether to attend. We replied that he had to make a calculation of what best served his movement's interests, and should not lose this opportunity to put as much pressure as possible on the regime to deliver on its promises. End note.)

REBELS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, CIVIL SOCIETY

¶7. (C) No major rebel groups will attend the SPI opening events in Khartoum or Kenana. SLA/AW, JEM, and SLA/U representatives all confirmed to Embassy Khartoum that they will not participate. SLA/AW appears to be the most resistant to attending the talks, though SLA/AW commander

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Suleiman Marajane told poloff on October 14 that the Qatar initiative would be more effective if it were not so closely associated with the Arab League. JEM wants direct bilateral negotiations with the Government, facilitated by the UN/AU chief mediator. SLA/U remains open to attending the Doha initiative as long as the Arab League's influence is minimized. SLA/U claimed that Arab militia continue to mount attacks against SLA/U positions east of Muhamaria in Jebel Marra. Commander Kado stated that no GOS Central Reserve Police (CRP) were used in the attack, but that the village of "Hajara" was destroyed, with "nine civilians" killed in the fighting. (Note: Commander Kado, though widely known and respected as one of the strongest rebel commanders in Darfur, is suspected by some of involvement in the July attack on UNAMID. End note.)

¶8. (C) The only political party that has confirmed its attendance at the SPI is Umma/National led by former Prime Minister Sadiq al Mahdi, who is widely believed to have struck a deal with the government on Darfur in exchange for a sizable monthly stipend. DUP/Mirghani remains unconfirmed, though party insiders report that Mirghani may send representatives to the opening ceremony. Opposition party representatives held a meeting on October 12 at the headquarters of the Communist party to discuss a common position on the SPI. Umma Reform and Renewal party leader Mubarak al Fadil claimed to polchief on October 12 that there is wide consensus among the opposition that they should not participate in the SPI as its chief objective is to help President Bashir avoid an ICC indictment. Nonetheless, al Fadil conceded that the Doha initiative might produce results "because the Qatars have deep pockets and are willing to pay off all the rebels." No civil society or IDP representatives known to the Embassy plan to attend the SPI. The civil society groups that are preparing proposals to end the Darfur

crisis seem reluctant to submit them for consideration at this time, despite encouragement from the Embassy that their proposals would be useful in Doha (ref B).

UN/AU MEDIATOR BASSOLE

¶ 9. (C) Chief Mediator Bassole was not planning to attend the opening ceremony of the SPI, but he changed his mind on October 13, according to his assistant, Laura Sitea. Bassole is in Geneva, and is scheduled to meet with SYG Ban ki Moon on October 14 to discuss his own role in the Qatar initiative and what statements he is authorized to make on behalf of the UN at the opening ceremony of the SPI on October 16. Sitea reported that Bassole remains concerned that the SPI is too closely associated with the Arab League's plan to help Bashir avoid the ICC. Nonetheless, Bassole recognizes that the Doha initiative could gain some credibility if the GOS makes a serious offer and if the key rebels can be convinced to participate. Sitea passed along a request from Bassole that the USG demarche the Qataris to request their support in insisting that the GOS meet on a bilateral basis with key rebels in advance of the Doha talks, to demonstrate their good will and inform the rebels of what they are prepared to offer. Bassole believes that if the GOS does not agree to do this, no rebels will attend the meetings in Doha, and this particular opportunity to advance the peace process will be lost.

SUGGESTED USG ACTIONS

¶ 10. (C) While there is little doubt that the SPI will be a show, and it remains to be seen if the GOS will offer any credible concessions at this stage, the Qatar initiative could advance the Darfur peace process if handled correctly. Embassy Khartoum suggests that the USG weigh in with the Qatari government, which might appreciate our assistance as well as a US offer to encourage key rebels to attend the Doha talks. In order to convince SLA/AW, SLA/U, and JEM/KI to attend, the Qataris must carefully control the list of participants and the framework used for discussions. They should not simply accept a list nor a framework from the Sudanese. Moreover, the Qataris should use their leverage to

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lean on the GOS to agree to meet bilaterally with the key rebels before the Doha talks as well as at the Doha talks - to distinguish the key rebels from the dozens of other faux and inconsequential rebels (some supported by the regime to sow confusion and weaken the movements) that will be invited.

These two points will allow us to make credible interventions with the rebels. As there are no other options on the table, the Qatar initiative deserves our full support.

If this process fails, many months will likely pass before another initiative materializes. Qatar has the resources to support this process, but they need our assistance.

ASQUINO